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MMOZine

Issue 16 | November 2009

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EXCLUSIVE REVIEW

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: THE FALL OF THE LICH KING

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HANDS ON!

EVE ONLINE: DOMINION

The future of the world's favourite space MMO

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PLUS LEGO UNIVERSE + DUST 514 + 5 YEARS OF WARCRAFT!

+ PREVIEWED

Lord of the Rings Online: Siege of Mirkwood

Turbine talk and we play

+ RELEASED

Cities XL

Blot on the landspace, or brave new world?

+ REVIEWED

Fallen Earth

Sifting through the fallout apocalypse

Welcome to MMOZine

World of Warcraft is five years old and remains the most popular MMORPG on the planet. I remember the overly hyped showdown between Blizzard's first attempt at a fantasy MMO and Sony Online's second, and it was supposed to be too close to call. Both had the pedigree, the ready-made fanbase and both Betas promised exciting times ahead. Then WoW just took off and left EverQuest II for dust.

World of Warcraft has influenced dozens of games that have followed in its wake, and many that preceded it. With everyone wanting to emulate its success, WoW has blazed a trail that has been so dominant that they're redefined what it means to be a fan of PC games. Whether you love it or merely tolerate it, World of Warcraft demands respect.

Richie Shoemaker, Editor
mmozine@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

The MMOZine massive were told to go forth and multiplay, which they did…

DAN GRILIOPOULOS
Dan's not shaving til he completes WoW.

PAUL PRESLEY
Laying down the foundations for his city of the future.

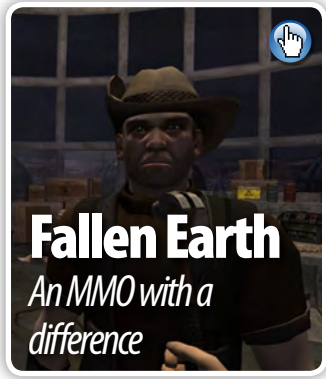
LESLEY SMITH
Exploring the past, present and future of all things Azeroth.

DON'T MISS!

This month's highlights…

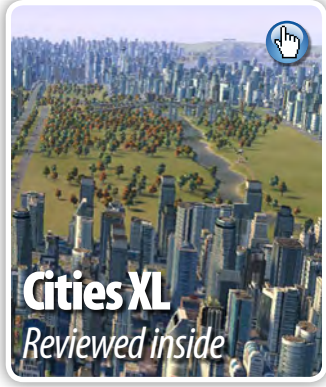
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: THE FALL OF THE LICH KING

The King has risen – read our definitive review



Fallen Earth

An MMO with a difference



Cities XL

Reviewed inside

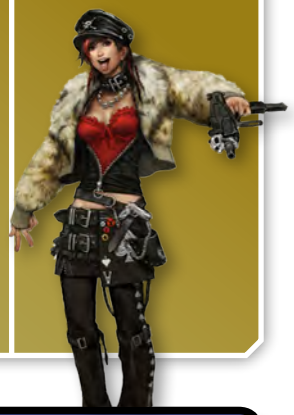
Lord of the Rings Online: The Seige of Mirkwood

The saga continues

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away

LEGO Universe
Dust 514
Star Trek Online
CrimeCraft
PlanetSide Next
Dragonica: Tales of the Damned
APB
Dungeons & Dragons: Eberron Unlimited
Galactic Command Online
Lord of the Rings: The Seige of Mirkwood
EVE Online: Domination
World of Warcraft: The Fall of the Lich King
Cities XL
Fallen Earth
Warhammer Online: Path of Conquest



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We recommend you close and re-open the magazine and select "Play" when asked about the multimedia to enjoy the magazine as intended.

AION

PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

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AION NCSOFT

LEGO Universe

Construction time again

Publisher: LEGO Media
Developer: NetDevil
Heritage: Jumpgate TRI, Jumpgate Evolution
Link: http://universe.lego.com
ETA: 2010

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of LEGO Universe

What's the story?

LEGO has been around since the days of national socialism, but whereas one has been a justifiable target for gamers, the other didn't manage to capture the imaginations of many button mashers until it joined forces with Star Wars. LEGO Universe hopes to re-capture hearts and minds of those eight years old and over without relying on expensive licences (although don't rule out a Star Wars add-on somewhere down the line).

What do we know?

Not as much as we'd like. Being something of an original IP where persistent worlds are concerned, LEGO could offer more possibilities than most. Co-operative building could be interesting, declaring your creations as smashable sounds like a hoot, while being able to have them shipped to you to build yourself from actual bricks is something you can already do anyway (http://designbyme.lego.com). What we also know is that the game will offer character creation, quests in various well-known zones, mini-games, plus a plastic-based economy where new bricks are unlocked and found. There will also be PvP in some form, although it's safe to say that hanging around and robbing children of their rare bricks will be tricky to pull off.

"Hanging around and robbing children of their rare bricks will be tricky to pull off"

When do we get more?

With NetDevil seemingly bogged down with Jumpgate Evolution, it's fair to say that they have plenty to be getting on with, so we're not expecting a great deal of new info before the end of the year. Rest assured, however, that dates are being booked to launch the game with some fanfare at a certain theme park in the near future, hopefully when the weather is more clement.

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ALLODS ONLINE

VIDEO 1 VIDEO 2 VIDEO 3

PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

ATTACK, DEFEND, LOOT OR PLUNDER! SET SAIL INTO THE ASTRAL WITH ALLODS ONLINE

"Allods Online has the potential to offer something really exciting in a genre that struggles to innovate"
(Videogamer.com, August 2009)

* Yep, you read that right. No subscriptions, ever!
Free to play MMORPG with player controlled space battleship in a fantasy space opera universe.
Allods Online features 2 factions, 28 classes, 1500 quests, PvP, PvE, raid, instance, boss monster, pets, guild, craft.
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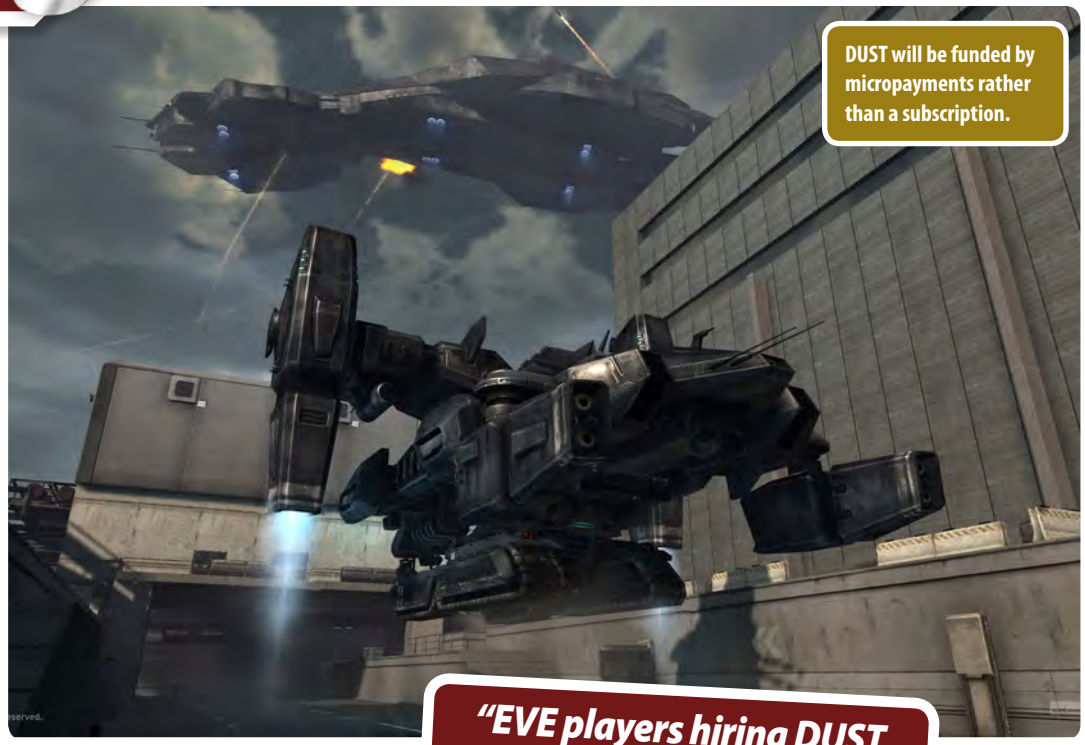
gPotato ASTRUM NIVAL PC ONLINE

DUST 514

Publisher: TBA
Developer: CCP Games (Shanghai)
Heritage: EVE Online
Link: www.eveonline.com
ETA: TBA

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Dust 514



DUST will be funded by micropayments rather than a subscription.

DUST 514

FIRST LOOK

Battles between the stars

What's the story?

While EVE Online has always concerned itself with fighting out in the depths of space, back on the ground the citizens of New Eden have been largely ignored save for a brace of novels and various slices of official fiction. DUST aims to show what life is like for the soldier of EVE, offering first-person multiplayer combat for console gamers, wrapped in a massively-multiplayer shell that the PC players of EVE can get in on.

What do we know?

Clearly inspired by Halo and the Battlefield series of games, DUST will feature four playable races, each with a host of weapons and vehicles that must be used to win the map. While the shooting and driving looks fun, the big draw is that as planets are conquered in the name of factions and corporations, the players of EVE Online in those organisations will benefit. Quite how has not been specified, but players of both game will be able to fight on the same side, albeit across separate theatres – far beyond the scope of any other MMO out there. EVE players hiring DUST mercenaries to take out mining bases is one tempting scenario, but we're unsure whether CCP will allow DUST players to board and takeover EVE ships.

"EVE players hiring DUST mercenaries to take out mining bases is one tempting scenario"

Not a pod pilot in sight.

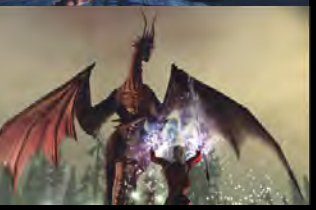
Life is cheap enough in EVE, it will be cheaper in DUST.

When do we get more?

CCP are concentrating on the Dominion expansion for EVE, which will define how DUST and EVE will interact. Another expansion based around planetary interaction will be required before we'll know how the two games will interact By then we'll have reason to get fully excited.

WHAT DIDN'T KILL ME
PREPARED ME FOR WHAT'S COMING.

PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED



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7 UP

New MMOs and content updates to mark on your calendar with a BIG RED PEN!

Star Trek Online

Developer: Cryptic

Happy days for Cryptic. Aside from announcing that their other MMOG Champions Online has reached one million characters, Star Trek Online has entered the crucial phase of closed beta testing. No release date has been announced, although servers look set to go live before April 2010.

CrimeCraft

Developer: Vogster | **ETA:** Out now

If you read the review last issue you'll remember we rather liked this cheeky MMO shooter, although we were confused by the payment options and urged caution until the game went freeplay. Well guess what? The game has now entered an unlimited free trial, with a two-tier subscription option.

PlanetSide Next

Developer: SOE | **ETA:** TBC

It's no secret that Sony is producing a sequel to everyone's favourite MMOFPS after emails asked players for input on the design of a PlanetSide sequel. SOE president John Smedley promises "massive battles on a scale no other FPS will touch, with much better organisation, and a tight focus on making sure the action is always going on, with awesome graphics".

Dragonica: Tales of the Damned

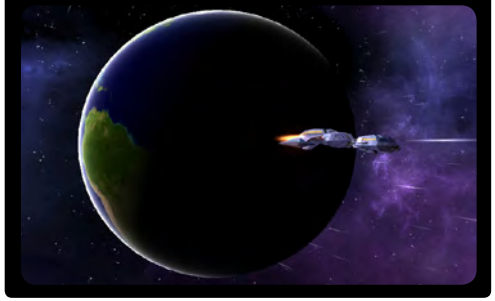
Developer: gPotato | **ETA:** Out now

With the headline feature being gamepad support, Dragonica: Tales of the Damned is the first expansion for our very favourite 2.5D cartoon MMOG, released in time to see Dragonica officially leave its beta phase in the cartoon dust. Other features of note include a 50-player tournament system, a level cap increase, cute pets and 'tons of new content'. That's what we like to hear.

Galactic Command Online

Developer: 3000AD | **ETA:** Early 2011

Developer Derek Smart has finally revealed the first solid details of what will be the final game in a series that began with Battecruiser 3000AD in 1992. GalCom Online will offer real-time ship command and first-person combat in a persistent and dynamic multiplayer universe. More massive in size than in player population, each universe will service up to 256 players.



ON THE RADAR

2010 — Age of Conan: Rise of the Godslayer

2010 — Mortal Online

DECEMBER — EVE Online: Domination

DECEMBER — Alganon

Dungeons & Dragons: Eberron Unlimited

Developer: Turbine

Since switching to a 'freeplay' model in the US, D&D Online has seen VIP accounts (subscriptions) rise by 40%. Turbine have yet to reveal whether the game will follow a similar model in Europe where it is still run as a subscription-based game by Codemasters, but Euro-zone players report that server numbers have dropped since September, when Unlimited went live across the pond.

APB

Developer: Realtime Worlds

MMOG All Points Bulletin has hopefully taken a shortcut to release by entering a phase of close beta testing. The highly-anticipated gangland action game will be out early in 2010, with partner Vivox providing real-time voice communications.

"THE BENCHMARK FOR ACTION GAMES
HAS JUST BEEN RAISED"

– CVG.com

CALL OF DUTY MODERN WARFARE 2

PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

18 | PS3 PlayStation 3 | PlayStation Network | XBOX 360 | XBOX LIVE | NINTENDO DS | PC DVD ROM | ACTIVISION activision.com | infinity ward

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Lord of the Rings Online: The Seige of Mirkwood

Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Turbine
Heritage: Lord of the Rings Online, Dungeons and Dragons Online, Asheron's Call II
Link: www.lotro.com
ETA: 3rd December

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of LotR Online: The Seige of Mirkwood

If you go down to the woods today…

In a crowded screening room in the basement of a posh London hotel, Turbine's Jeffrey Steefel is showing us the terrifying (and unpronounceable) tower of Dol Guldur. Situated deep in the forest of Mirkwood, just across the river from the elven paradise of Lorien. it's a foreboding 12-man raid – which he is soloing. For 20 minutes he has been teleporting through the tower and now stands in the final room where you can summon Sauron's resident lieutenant. But, as if being punished by the gaming gods for waving an arm and causing all the mobs in a room to collapse and die, he is unable to summon the Nazgul at the tower's summit. Karma eh?

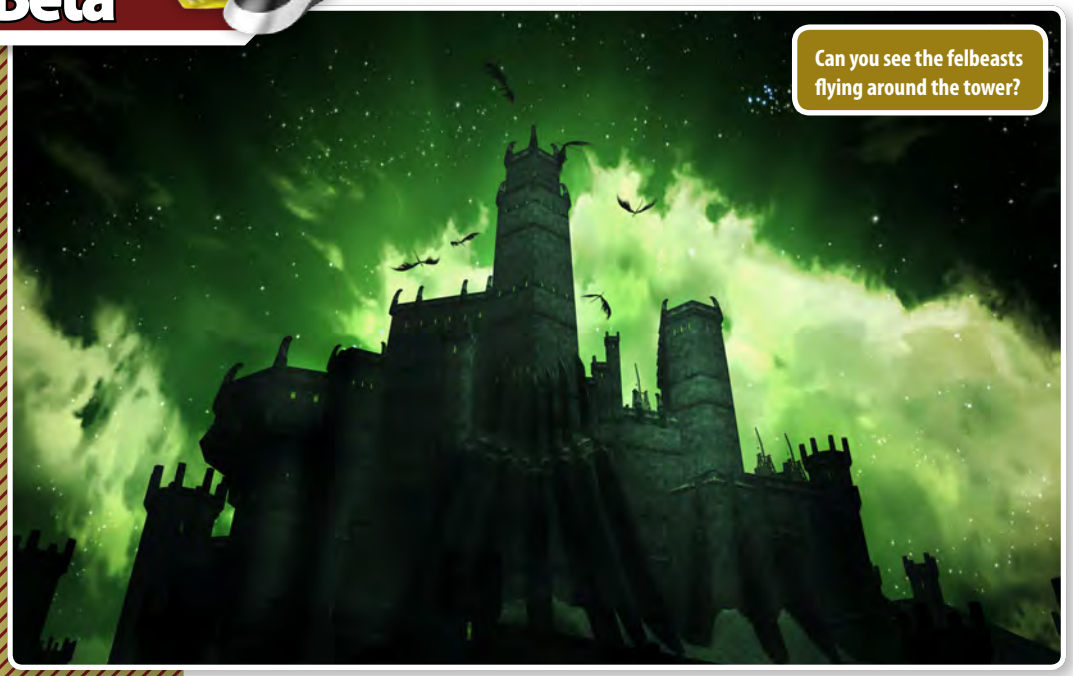
Siege of Mirkwood is the latest expansion for the popular Tolkien-based MMO which expands the world of Middle Earth as well as the level cap. Oh, and it's due out next month, which is not bad given that the expansion was only announced a couple of months ago.

Into the Mirk

Mirkwood is the main area, a dark and dense half-dead forest. The stuff of fantasy nightmares, filled with all manner of beasts and denizens which really enjoying chowing down on adventuring heroes. From the banks of this alien territory you can see the golden forests of Lorien on the other side of the rivers, providing a stark contrast. You know from the moment you engage the ferryman's services that

"Mirkwood is the main area, a dark and dense half-dead forest. The stuff of fantasy nightmares"

Mirkwood is located just next to Lorien.

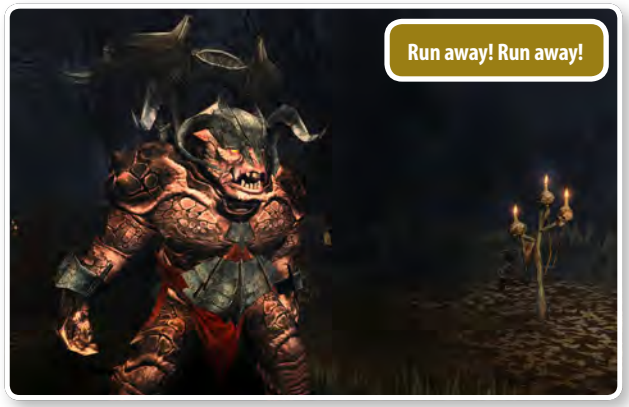

Can you see the felbeasts flying around the tower?

Lord of the Rings Online continues to evoke the essence of Middle Earth.

LotR Online continued

you're headed to a dark and terrible place. But, of course, as a champion of Middle Earth it's somewhere that you must go.

The area contains small bastions of safety, though; little camps and outposts where you can rest and refuel before continuing the assault. The Hill of Sorcery (as Dol Guldur is also known in lore) towers above the forest with felbeasts swooping around it. It looks everything like it should and more. Yet even before you step inside, there are towering creatures which want to smash you to tiny pieces. Indeed, a large percentage of the mobs seem to be much larger than you, and this intimidation is a part of what is going to make this raid so memorable – and indeed it should be. This is heightened by the


Run away! Run away!

fleeting glimpses of the Eye of Sauron which appears as you move through the tower, turning the screen red as the pupil is superimposed over the screen.

Horses for courses

As with Mines of Moria, there's something in Siege of Mirkwood for everyone. Endgame raiders get five more levels, the raid in Dol Guldur and the chance to face

ANYONE FOR A SKIRMISH?

The Skirmish system is a PvE mechanic which is a part of the main game but also separate from it. These instanced areas are very pick-up-and play, offering something to do while you wait for raids or only have ten minutes spare. For example, we were shown an instanced version of Bree which is under attack.

You have to go to certain points on the map and defend them from attack, like the infamous Prancing Pony. This sounds complicated but it's actually more like PvP where you stand and click a monument, then wait a couple of seconds for it to activate.

The fun thing about this is that it's a different game mechanic which allows players to gain Skirmish points from completing objectives. You can then spend these points on gear from vendors, it's another way for players who aren't hardcore raiders to get themselves in decent armour and wield kickarse weaponry.

LotR Online continued

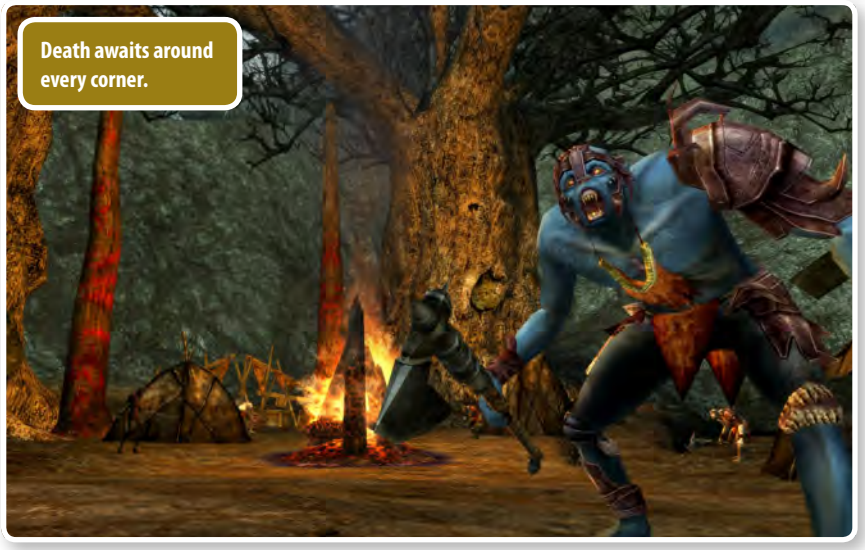
off against a Ringwraith. But it's not all about them, as crafters get new legendary items, vendors are now even easier to find and anyone over level 30 can take part in a Skirmish. On top of this, anyone with a horse will rejoice as their trusty steed no longer consumes valuable inventory space, it's now a skill. Even better, gone are the days when you will be kicked from your horse if you talk to a vendor and you can now emote to your heart's content as well. It's little, seemingly cosmetic, aspects like this which really complete the expansion perfectly.

In full swing

With less than a month until Siege of Mirkwood hits, the expansion proves that the War of the Ring is now in full swing and it's our job to be a part of it. Yet this is just the beginning of the story of The Lord of the Rings Online as a new volume begins. But Sauron's forces are rising and it's your job to do your bit to help to help the Fellowship of the Ring. This new expansion begins a new era and over the next year, we will see even more Books of juicy new content. Only one questions remains: are you prepared to stand up against the forces of Sauron and help the Elves lay siege to Mirkwood?

"This expansion proves that the War of the Ring is now in full swing and it's our job to be a part of it"

Now *that's* a crossbow.



Death awaits around every corner.

MMOZine Verdict

Whether it's horses, raiding or Skirmishes, there's something for everyone in Mirkwood

HOW COMPLETE

95%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

85%

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LINEAGE II TEAM

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EVE DOMINION

Publisher: CCP Games
Developer: CCP Games
Heritage: EVE Online
Link: www.eveonline.com
ETA: 1st December

EVE Online: Dominion

World domination is making a comeback in a galaxy near you

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of EVE Online Dominion

CCP aren't messing about with this one. Unlike the obscure naming conventions of expansions past, EVE's 11th add-on is focused on alliances and their collective efforts to claim and keep territory. In EVE the mechanic is called sovereignty, and it's one that for years has been maligned by EVE's endgamers, who've had to go through the tedious process of erecting starbases to claim space, and the equally numbing process of destroying them to take it back. "Sovereignty 2.0" as it's been dubbed, is about being active in the systems you hold, which allows territory holders to upgrade their systems in various ways. Planetary XP, if you will.

Tackling the problem from another angle has required EVE developers to re-think

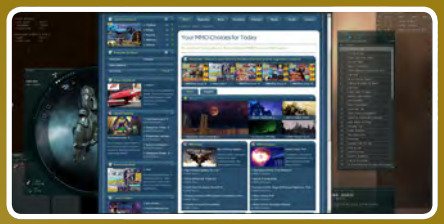
If Philadelphia were a planet, it would look like this.

"EVE's 11th add-on is focused on alliances and their collective efforts to claim and keep territory"

Faction ships get a reacharound.

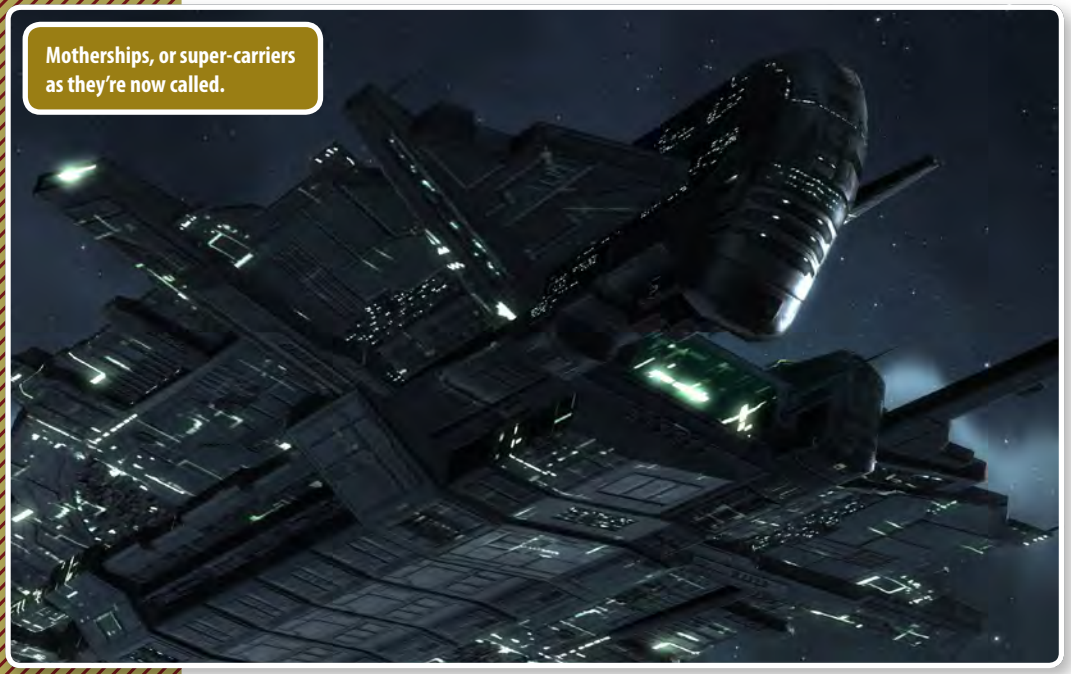
YOU'VE GOT EVE-MAIL

EVE has had its own in-game browser and mail system since the very beginning, both of which were basic even in 2003 and have barely been upgraded since. As part of the New Eden portal, users of EVEmail can look forward to tagging mail for the first time, while the browser – based on Google's



Chrome browser – will allow you to view most of your favourite websites and will allow for many more in-game tools to be created in the future by enterprising players.

You try repelling fire of that magnitude.

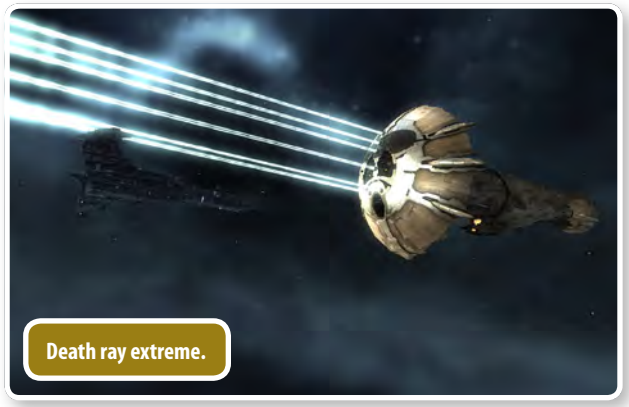


Motherships, or super-carriers as they're now called.

EVE Online continued

how capital ships are used. The problem currently is that there are too many titans in space, each one a mini Death Star that can decimate smaller, more interesting ships in a single press of a button, frustrating their pilots and turning fleet warfare into one where the biggest blob of ships wins. Post Dominion titans will keep their devastating weapons, but they will be targeted rather than area effect weapons of mass destruction. In addition, the redesigned super-carriers will be able to deploy the all-new fighter bomber drones, a flight of which should prove suitably deadly for anything bigger than a battleship. In short, fleet fights should become much more interesting.

While the previous expansion, Apocrypha, was a literal one, with hundreds of new systems and ship



Death ray extreme.

combinations thrown into the mix – as well as a new tech layer for the crafters to enjoy – Dominion is a more muted upgrade. Back-of-the-box features are unlikely to tempt many newcomers, but for the New Eden faithful, the focus on EVE's infrastructure is welcome. Building on Apocrypha are new epic story arc missions, these ones focusing on EVE's pirate factions as opposed to the established empires, as well

FINDING YOUR FLEET

The changes to capital and faction ships aren't the only developments to fleet combat. The interface for the management of fleets is also being tinkered with, with the creation of a Fleet Finder function. At a basic level this will operate in a similar way to your typical Looking For Group window, which begs the question why it's taken so long to become a part of EVE. Thankfully it

offers far greater functionality than some copycat effort, with changes to the fleet broadcast system and loot sharing and export functions. Joining the fight may never be the same again.

EVE DOMINION

EVE Online continued

as so-called "speedboat" missions that will require mission runners to fit their ships for speed rather than being able to tank against NPC spawns. The tutorial is also being augmented by an advanced warfare mission that will be EVE's Kobayashi Maru – designed to get players used to the idea of losing their ship, necessary if they are to engage in PvP combat in the game.

Perhaps one of the most significant developments that will be introduced in Dominion is one confusingly called New Eden, but which players are calling "Spacebook." It's the first iteration of a social networking layer that will allow players to check in-game mail via a web portal, add friends, change their status and manage skill training, market orders and pretty much anything that doesn't require a ship – at least that's the long-term plan. Perhaps the most useful feature will be a calendar function so that corp leaders can schedule transport and mining operations, log what members were doing when and basically keep tabs on everyone. Combined with the power of the EVE API, it's a feature that should inspire a whole host of new third-party applications.

Despite a complete lack of new ships (aside from the aforementioned drones), there will be a significant overhaul of some of the graphics. The background starfield has been updated, while each of the 50,000 planets will be receiving a makeover thanks to some clever procedural texturing.

What is significant about this development is that it's being done between CCP's Iceland HQ and its Shanghai office, the latter being largely behind the development of the console shooter DUST 514 that CCP announced back in August. The planets players will fly past next month when Dominion is released will the be the same that DUST players will be fighting over when that game eventually comes out. They won't do much more than look pretty in the New Eden sky, but they will serve to remind players that CCP are far from being done when it comes to evolving EVE.

The ship design is inspired.

Something makes me think this game was designed by a man…

MMOZine Verdict

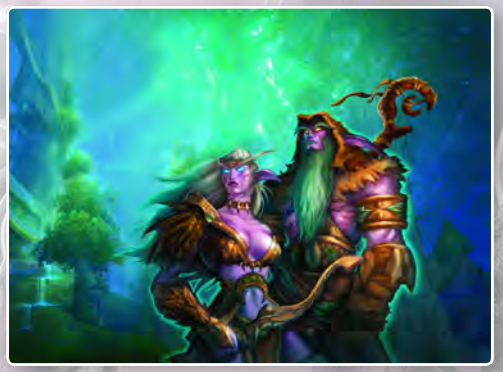
Firm new foundations for future developments

HOW COMPLETE

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

To Azeroth and Back: The Evolution of World of Warcraft

This November marks a milestone in the life of one of the world's biggest MMOs, as Blizzard's World of Warcraft is celebrating its fifth anniversary as well as the end of the Lich King's tyranny and the promise of Deathwing's cataclysmic return. So how did we get here, and what's coming next?



It's important to remember that unlike other MMOs, Azeroth did not begin with WoW. It was not a new IP but an old one, forged by a series of RTS games – Warcraft: Orcs and Humans, Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness, its expansion Beyond the Dark Portal and, most importantly, Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos and the Arthas-centric expansion pack The Frozen Throne. These games provided the rich lore which formed a base for World of Warcraft as well as its expansions. They also meant that WoW was hotly anticipated by a huge fanbase of loyal players, eager to see Azeroth in a new light. Since release, this has ballooned to nearly 12 million players around the world and the number just keeps on growing.

Set four years after the battle of Mount Hyjal – when the Horde and the Alliance put aside their differences to battle the threat of the Burning Legion – Azeroth was in chaos. The old animosity between the races and their factions have once again reappeared. With the Horde led by Thrall and the Alliance by the missing king Varian Wrynn, this animosity was no more obvious than on PvP servers or in specific PvP areas where players were able to take the spirit of the game as intended, by killing each other. But WoW also introduced players to a rich world of varying landscapes and hostile environments. With 60 levels, boss encounters and raids, it wasn't surprising that the game took off and the first expansion, The Burning Crusade, soon followed.

SPOTLIGHT ON: ONYXIA

The daughter of the mad Dragon Aspect Deathwing, Onyxia, was one of the first raid bosses to be included in vanilla WoW, but could only be accessed via a memorable and lengthy attunement quest chain. Most of her time was spent in Stormwind, disguised as the human Katrana Prestor. However, brave champions could reveal her deception, and then go to the Wrymbog in the Wetlands and venture into her lair.

Those who succeeded would return to their capital and display the dragon's head for all to see. Indeed, so important is Onyxia to WoW lore, that even after being killed canonically by Varian Wrynn, she was recently revamped as a level 80 raid boss for the game's fifth anniversary. Players should check their mail this November, as players will be sent an Onyxia Whelpling to commemorate World of Warcraft's fifth birthday.

Return of the Burning Legion

The lowlown on the first expansion

"The expansion reconnected with the original RTS titles by reintroducing Illidan Stormrage"

The demon Kil'Jaeden was the final raid boss of The Burning Crusade.

The first expansion, released in January 2007, fleshed out Azeroth but also introduced Outland, the shattered world of Draenor. Yes this fantasy game suddenly became a space opera, a move which garnered mixed reviews from players. From a lore perspective, players were finally able to play as the magic-addicted Blood Elves and the exiled Draenei, pacifist space-goats who landed on an island near Teldrassil, off the coast of Kalimdor.

This expansion also reintroduced important figures in lore. There was the sorcerer Medivh in his epic tower of Karazhan, but also in the Caverns of Time where he could be found opening the Dark Portal. The Blood Elves' power-hungry prince Kael'thas could be found in Outland's instance of Tempest Keep, while Aszhara's right-hand, Lady Vashj led the Naga from inside the Coilfang Reservoir.

But it also reconnected with the original RTS titles by reintroducing Illidan Stormrage – now ruling Outland with an iron fist from the Black Temple. As players levelled from 60 to 70 being stomped on by Fel Reavers or exploring the floating islands of Negrand, they could learn to use a flying mount while Druids gained two new flight forms. This new ability also meant players couldn't access all the expansion content at once, rather new areas became unlocked once a flying mount or flight form was purchased.

Patch 2.1 introduced the hardcore endgame raid Black Temple where raiders – who had completed the lengthy attunement – could fight through a massive raid and face off against Illidan. Subsequent patches also introduced the troll instance of Zul'Aman and the infamous Sunwell where players could not only connect with NPCs from the tie-in manga but also had the chance at beating back the demon Kil'jaeden and re-energising the source of the Blood Elves' magic and civilisation.

The Blood Elves starting zone was an autumnal forest at the northernmost area of the Eastern Kingdoms.

SPOTLIGHT ON: ILLIDAN STORMRAGE

Once a powerful Mage, Illidan's lust for power culminated into his transformation from a Night Elf to something more demonic. Banished from Azeroth by his brother Malfurion Stormrage, the Betrayer retreated to Outland and creating alliances with the Broken Akama, the Naga Lady Vashj and the Blood Elf prince Kael'thas Sunstrider.

At one time tasked with the destruction of the Frozen Throne, Illidan was nearly killed by Arthas Menethil, then the Lich King's favoured Death Knight. He then returned to Outland where the Betrayer was where killed by champions of Azeroth, aided by Akama and Illidan's one-time jailer Maiev Shadowsong.

The Rise and Fall of the Lich King

The Kirin Tor's city of Dalaran floats above Northrend.

All hail the King…

This expansion, focusing on the fallen Prince of Lordaeron, Arthas Menethil, was announced at BlizzCon 2007. Released last November, it finally introduced the new continent of Northrend as well as the first hero class: the Death Knight. While the Lich King played a much more prominent role that Illidan did in The Burning Crusade, he was not the only antagonist. Players also had to deal with the Blue Dragonflights and its leader Malgyos, who had declared war on the spellcasters of Azeroth.

Blizzard also began to open up the endgame. While guilds like Vodka and Ensidia inevitably got world firsts, endgame raiding was no longer limited to just the largest guilds, the best players or the highest level gear. Indeed, by the time Ulduar was released in Patch 3.2, almost any guild was capable of progressing through this forbidding Titan citadel to defeat the Old God Yogg-Saron and the Titan's celestial observer, Algalon.

"Like the Black Temple, Icecrown Citadel has been a shadow over Northrend since the earliest Beta"

Patch 3.3, the Call of the Crusade, also opened up the idea of an on-going contest to find champions capable of killing the Lich King once and for all. While not a pre-requisite to enter Icecrown Citadel, it offered a new outlet for players waiting for the storyline's conclusion, new quests and gear – as well as the ability to joust.

Like the Black Temple, Icecrown Citadel has been a shadow over Northrend since the earliest Beta. The Lich King has also been a constant companion to players, appearing in instances and quests, even killing the player on occasion, goading them on to greatness as level 80 called. Now the champions of Azeroth can finally enter his palace and face off against numerous bosses, from abominations and vampiric Blood Elves to the mighty Sindragosa herself and, of course, her master.

But these heroes do not do so alone, they are accompanied by the legendary NPCs Jaina Proudmoore and Sylvanas Windrunner, the two most notable women in Arthas life, and both have their own personal reasons for venturing into the Lich King's domain.

SPOTLIGHT ON: THE LICH KING

Originally an Orc Shaman from the world of Draenor, Ner'zhul was transformed into the Lich King by Kil'jaeden. No more than the fragments of a soul merged mystically with armour, the Lich King was originally imprisoned in a massive block of ice (The Frozen Throne) hurled into Northrend.

From his icy prison, the Lich King turned the archmage Kel'thuzad and created the Scourge, eventually even twisting the young prince Arthas and transforming him into a Death Knight. Carrying the runeblade Frostmourne, Arthas released the Lich King from his prison and then put on the helm, merging to create a new entity of unimaginable power. After several years of silence, the Lich King has now awoken to lead his army into battle…

Cataclysm and Beyond...

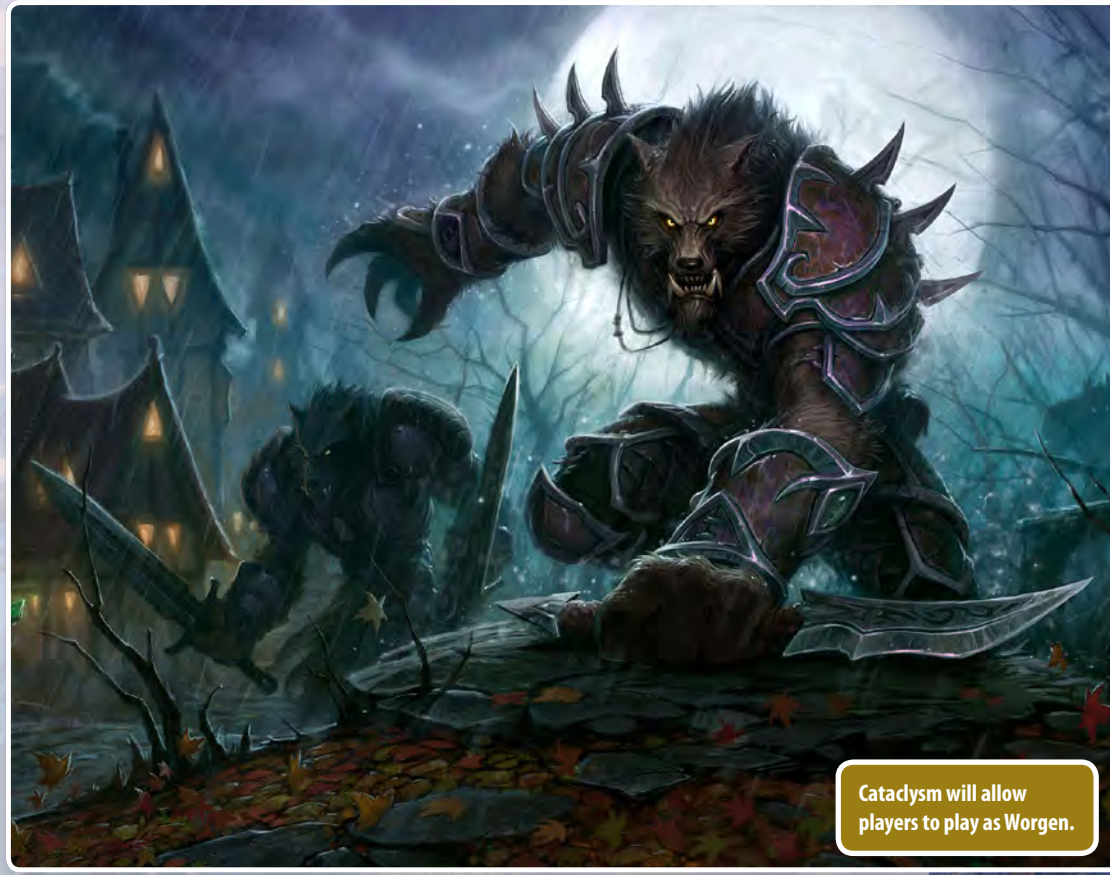
Something wicked this way comes

Cataclysm was announced earlier this year at BlizzCon, and also focuses firmly on Azeroth and an even greater adversary. Distracted by the threat of the Lich King, the heroes of the Alliance and the Horde will be forced to watch as the dragon Deathwing explodes back into Azeroth, literally reshaping the world.

In some ways, this is an attempt to revamp a virtual world which is five years old, as well as allowing players to fly anywhere. In effect, these changes make Catacysm, WoW 2.0 by changing stats, completely changing the graphical look and even how players navigate the land. As well as once more increasing the level cap, this expansion will also introduce two new races – a cartel of Goblins and humans transformed into the wolf-like Worgen – as well as finally opening up the mysterious zones of Gilneas and Hyjal among others.

But it also allows – both from a lore and game mechanics perspective – for each race to have access to new classes. Older, classic bosses like Ragnaros will also return, and classic instances like Deadmines and Shadowfang Keep are seeing much-needed revamps to become even more challenging that there were originally.

WoW's future is bright, but Azeroth's is less so. However the promise of a brave and much-changed world means that the lure of Blizzard's flagship title will be even stronger than ever.



Cataclysm will allow players to play as Worgen.

SPOTLIGHT ON: DEATHWING

Once blessed by the Titans as the Aspect of Earth, the black dragon Neltharion was driven mad by the imprisoned Old Gods. Under their direction, he created the magical artifact known as the Demon Soul and used it to enslave and decimate the other Dragonflights, taking the name of Deathwing. Eventually defeated, he retreated to the Elemental Plane of Deepholm to recover. However, Cataclysm will see Deathwing return to the world and his explosive return will reforge the land and change the planet it we know as Azeroth it forever.

Publisher: Blizzard Entertainment
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Heritage: Starcraft, Diablo II, Warcraft III
Link: www.wow-europe.com
ETA: TBA

World of Warcraft: The Fall of the Lich King

"Each type of Warrior Spirit brings a different ability to the table"

The King is dead…

The end is here for Arthas in the culmination of the Wrath of the Lich King storyline. This is what WoW players have been waiting for since the expansion's release last November… the final showdown in the forbidding fortress of Icecrown Citadel against one of the greatest foes ever to torment Azeroth. Excited yet? Well, you really should be.

Like previous patches and mini-expansions, Patch 3.3 (aka The Fall of the Lich King) contains a slew of new features, weapons and class tweaks but the main focus is, of course, on the showdown between the heroes of Azeroth and the Lich King. Indeed, it's hard to notice any changes until you fly to Icecrown Citadel. The structure is not new, as it's been there since the first days of Wrath's Beta; a foreboding structure looming over Northrend, that's been a prominent reminder, even if you happen to be catching up on some shopping in Dalaran.

Legions of Argent Crusade and Ebon Blade warriors guard the entrance to the previously sealed interior, which features new dungeons in the form of the Frozen Halls, the Pit of Saron and the Halls of Reflection with its twisted replica of the throne room where Arthas murdered his father. Of course, there's also an epic Icecrown Citadel raid which sees the demise of the former prince of Lordaeron. You also have the chance to face off with the mysterious Deathbringer, as well as the Frostwrym brood mother, Sindragosa, who's been happily roaring at us from the login screen since before Wrath launched.

The patch is aimed squarely at raiders and lore nerds, featuring new achievements, titles and the chance to help the two women in Arthas' life bring down the Lich King. Horde get to help out Sylvanas while the Alliance assist the sorceress Jaina Proudmoore. And, to commemorate the occasion, Jaina finally gets a makeover just as Sylvanas did in an earlier patch.

Whichever side you happen to play, there's an epic quest chain

You have a choice of dungeons but they must be completed before Halls of Reflection.

Altaholics will find the character selection screen has finally been revamped.

Don't let their size fool you, you are going to die.

World of Warcraft cont.

which sees players encroaching on the Lich King's citadel and the change to get a new legendary weapon, the axe Shadowmourne. Players will also see the return of a familiar hero in a new, disturbing form – the Deathbringer. You also get to fight the Lich King himself not once but twice. The first time you meet him is in the Halls of Reflection but the point is not to kill him, rather than to weaken him enough that you stand a chance of killing him during the Icecrown Citadel raid.

Blizzard has also used this as an opportunity to try out some new boss fights. This includes a Horde v Alliance gunship battle where players must race each other. It also involves jet packs – in case you were worried it was going to go horribly wrong. The other fight of note involves Valithria Dreamwalker, a captured green dragon. Rather than kill her, you actually have to

EXPLORING THE CITADEL

Time for a guided tour…

ENTER ON THE RIGHT | CHOICE OF DUNGEON | WATCH YOUR STEP

Icecrown Citadel has been taunting us – you'll find that the entrance to the dungeons is on the right.

THE LADIES IN ARTHAS' LIFE

Of all Azeroth, two women know Arthas better than most, and it's fitting they have a role in his destruction – Sylvanas Windrunner, former Ranger of Silvermoon and current Queen of the Forsaken, and the human Mage and ruler of Theramore, Jaina Proudmoore.

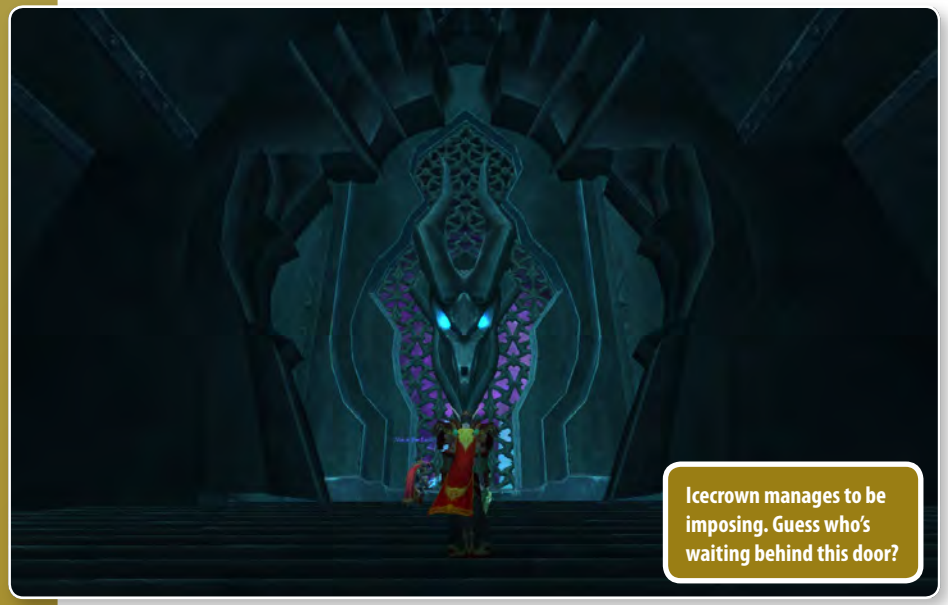
Players of Warcraft III will be intimately

familiar with both women, as will readers of the novel Arthas: Rise of the Lich King.

Sylvanas is seeking vengeance against Arthas, who tortured, killed and then transformed her into a banshee. Jaina, meanwhile, was a long-time friend and former lover of Arthas during his human life who watched as he turned from the Light.

Both women have played a vital role in the lore of the game and now get their true time in the limelight as they help players, fighting alongside us as we confront Arthas for the final time.

Your backup army is floating… that can't be good.


Icecrown manages to be imposing. Guess who's waiting behind this door?

World of Warcraft cont.

defend her from legions of Elites, Liches and Scourge so she can regain enough of her strength to teleport back to the Emerald Dream. Oh and, purely on the awesome boss model front, there's a blood Elf vampire (sorry, San'layn) Queen to kill as well.

But don't be fooled, endgame raiders won't be finishing Icecrown Citadel in five minutes or even five days. There are plenty of disgusting abominations and undead bosses waiting to be defeated before you even get close to the Frozen Throne. Much like Naxxramas, Icecrown Citadel is divided into quarters, each filled with a distinctive kind of abomination. Yet it's also breathtaking with the Frozen Throne at its heart, stretching up higher than the eye can see. This is a good thing, as The Fall of the Lich King marks the final major content patch of the Wrath storyline, paving the way for Deathwing's cataclysmic return.

But, of course, that's not all. The LFG system has been completely revamped, the character creation screen has been tinkered with and the tutorial system has also been made more obvious. Levelling is even easier and the quest tracker makes things simpler. It's additions like this which add to the overall impact of Wrath and the ever-evolving nature of World of Warcraft. Next stop: Cataclysm!

PULSOMETER: Signs of life

MMOZine Verdict

A fitting end to the latest and greatest WoW expansion

- ✓ Massive new dungeon
- ✓ New LFG system
- ✗ Very Icecrown-centric

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Publisher: Monte Cristo
Developer: Monte Cristo
Heritage: City Life
Link: www.citiesxl.com
OUT NOW

Cities XL

City-building sim goes extra-large

We're all up to speed on this one by now, right? Sim City clone with online elements, yeah? What has been important for Monte Cristo is that above and beyond any of the online and multiplayer aspects being experimented with, the basic 'single-player' city building game had to be enjoyable. All the fancy token trading, avatar exploring and social networking tools wouldn't count for squat if you weren't having any fun building your cities to begin with.

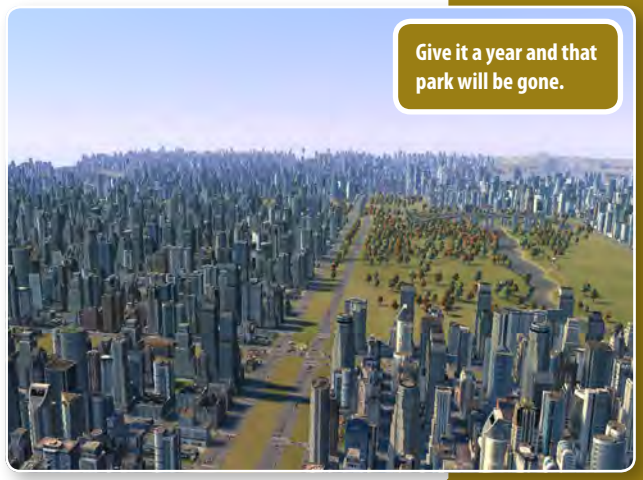
Luckily, Cities XL doesn't disappoint here. While developers like Maxis have struggled to bring the genre into today's gaming arena with lacklustre efforts such as SimCity Societies, Monte Cristo have produced a city building simulation that works on most levels, packs itself full of innovative touches (curved roads, anyone?), and still merges seamlessly with the online world it's attempting to embrace.

Idyllic. Rural. Probably full of angsty teens.

We have a sudden urge to go see Zombieland again.

Apart from anything else, it gets the pace thing spot on, starting you out slowly enough not to overwhelm you, but with enough options open to let you expand in any way you choose, unveiling bigger and better facilities as your city's population reaches certain milestones and as your own skill level grasps the way different buildings interact with each other.

It's not perfect by any means. Being an online title means it will constantly be tweaked, patched and expanded from now until the servers grow as cold and lifeless as a European Parliament debate on the annual crop yields of Luxembourgian farmland (which, oddly enough, you could attempt to replicate in-game if you were so perversely inclined). But it's by no means a bad game. In fact, it's very good. The interface could do with a tweak, the trading windows could be clearer, the road placement tool (while better than most) could still be a little smoother, and the whole avatar feature is more redundant than another simile in this paragraph. In fact, the whole game reeks of that peculiarly lax attitude


Give it a year and that park will be gone.

Obviously a mountain with confidence issues.

And they said wind farms wouldn't catch on…

Cities XL continued

to conventional polish and presentation standards that seems to permeate throughout most European-developed games. It's almost as if they're anti-interface in that part of the world. Anyway, it's not major, and the underlying game is structured perfectly.

From the online perspective, it could do with better in-game social tools. The use of the accompanying website to manage trade aspects is a great thing, and there are a goodly amount of social options to be found there – journal/blogs, profiles, friend lists and player searches, etc. But in-game it seems a bit lax: a basic chat window and simple player finding tools, but that's about it. The notion of everyone gathering with their avatars in one city's main park area is a novel one, but it'll never catch on or be anywhere as useful as something as simple as guild-style communication tools would be. There isn't even an official forum, although some would argue this isn't necessarily a bad thing.

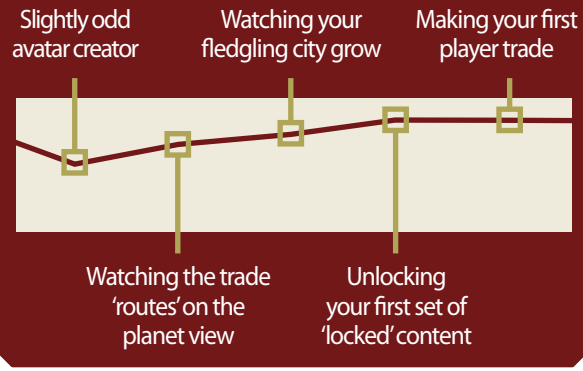
Which does throw forward the argument that charging a monthly fee for, essentially, some trade options, doesn't really justify value for money, and it's hard to disagree. Cities XL is almost certainly one of those games that would have distinctly benefited from exploiting a microtransaction model, charging once for the basic game, then letting advanced mayors pay for extra building models and types, the GEMs (downloadable modules that open mini-management-style sub-games depending on your

city – ski and beach resorts, for instance) and the more advanced functionality. The very nature of Sim City-style games are that you can dip in and out as you need to, but being forced to keep a daily eye on it just because you're paying every month to do so feels counter-productive to encouraging people to play.

Monte Cristo has made some attempts to encourage regular play though, including the delayed-at-launch (but finally available) Megastructures. Essentially, these

In-game advertising for something you don't ever see in-game. Hang on a minute…

PULSOMETER: Signs of life


Slightly odd avatar creator
Watching your fledgling city grow
Making your first player trade
Watching the trade 'routes' on the planet view
Unlocking your first set of 'locked' content

Cities XL continued

huge beasts require a constant supply of trade tokens to construct over a substantial period of time, thus requiring regular visits to the marketplace to get the goods you need. The end result is pretty much bonuses to stats (such as percentage boosts to keeping the Executives sated), and while it's a step in the right direction, it still doesn't quite feel like the 'killer ap' the online play needs.

So, the basic summation is that as a Sim City game, Cities XL is very good. Lots of thought, structure, innovation and good old addictive playability. As an online game it shows a lot of promise but not enough to justify regular player investment at this stage. Should Monte Cristo have the courage to see it through, and enough players believe in it – or if they make the decision to go free-to-play/ microtransaction on its ass – then we could be on to a winner. Which is what it deserves to be, ultimately. ●

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game, one step at a time…

LOOKING GOOD
First step is to create your avatar. Obviously this should resemble you as closely as possible…

LONELY PLANET
Choosing where to start is important, be it at the base of a volcano or on the side of a mountain.

SCOUT IT OUT
One day, this will all be fields… wait, I mean hi-tech factories churning out cheap-ass toys.

HOME FROM HOME
Pop down your town hall and you can start building your first set of homes and retail parks.

MEGA-CITY ONE
Ultimately you'll want something like this. A sprawling metropolis full of people paying high taxes.

MMOZine Verdict

Sim City online? Very nearly

- ✓ Solid city-building gameplay
- ✓ Excellent out-of-game tools
- ✗ Not really worth the online subscription fee

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Fallen Earth

Publisher: SouthPeak/ Fallen Earth
Developer: Fallen Earth LLC, Icarus Studios
Heritage: N/A
Link: www.fallenearth.com
OUT NOW

Did we fall for this earthly delight?

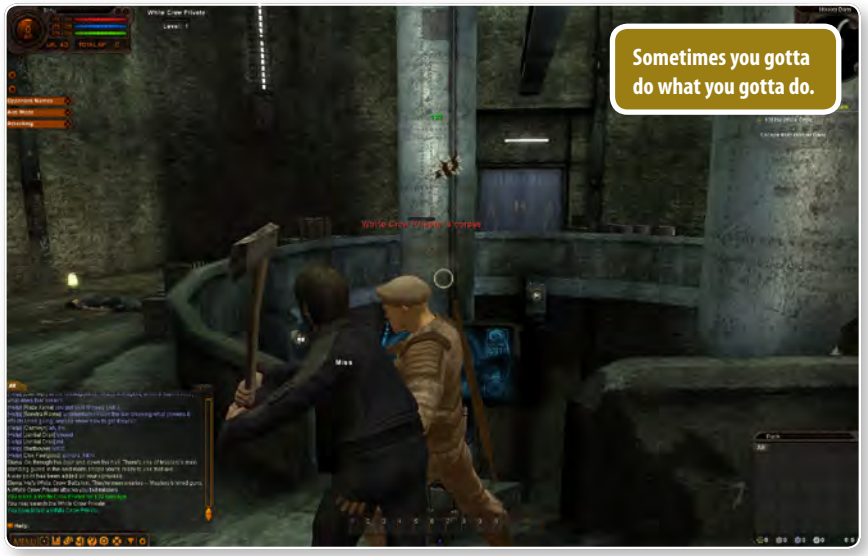
With Middle Earth-style fantasy on one side and techno space opera on the other, the post-apocalyptic wasteland is where both seemingly incongruous styles of fiction can conveniently meet without it all seeming a bit silly and pretentious. Mutant powers instead of magic, secret technology cults researching lasers, and for those who prefer a dose of alt-reality in their gaming scenarios, Fallen Earth plays up to contemporary fears of global viruses, dirty bombs and nihilist fundamentalism with far more conviction than any Glenn Beck TV rant.

That alone might be worth the subscription fee, but the big question is whether Fallen Earth is anywhere near as good as a Fallout MMOG might be, if indeed a persistent world Fallout is ever likely to be released at all, given the legal shenanigans that are currently under way. It's an impossible question to answer for obvious reasons, but let's give it a try anyway.

First off, Fallen Earth doesn't feel much like Fallout, or look much like it either. Obviously you are not the lone survivor in quite the same desolate mutated wilderness. Fallen Earth is sufficiently populated by other survivors for it not to feel like a wilderness at all, despite the wreckage of a more enlightened age all about you. A future Wild West would be a more apt description, since players are often found loitering in the hubs of shanty towns, with their horses tied up outside and automatic weapons slung across their backs. As for the interface, you certainly don't get anything as neat as the PIP, which is probably just as well. MMO players like their voluminous interface layers and icon bars and Fallen Earth doesn't disappoint on that front

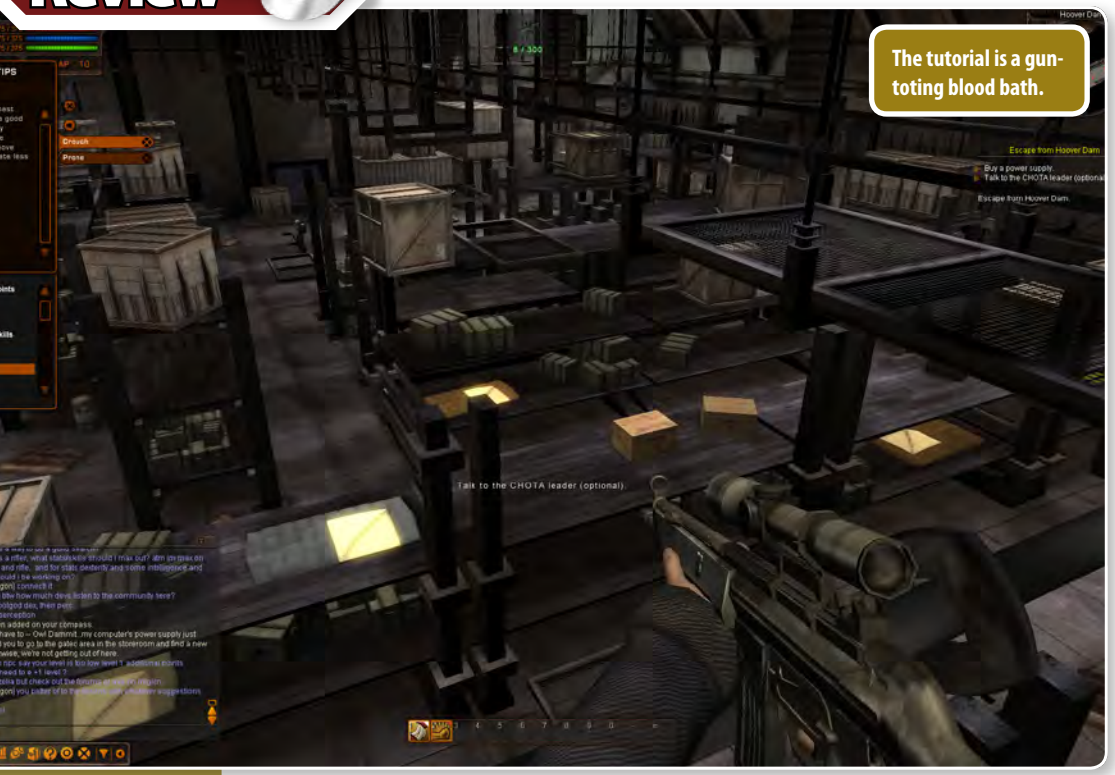
Near-future setting aside, what binds Fallout with Fallen Earth is the mix of character advancement and first-

Enjoy the ride!


Sometimes you gotta do what you gotta do.

FIRST ONE STANDING

With so many obvious references to create a look that apes a dusty gunfighter, a soldier or a street punk, the character creator is a little disappointing. Most body shapes seem to come out dumpy, and most of the hair styles are so unconvincing that you'll be grateful to acquire your first hat. If tattoos and piercings are your thing then you'll be happier with the selection on offer, but with eyes that look dead inside, you'll be glad you won't have to see the face of your alter ego all that often.



The tutorial is a gun-toting blood bath.

Fallen Earth continued

person combat. There are no character classes in Fallen Earth, which of course allows for a lot of leeway when you ponder where next to take your skills and attributes. Experience gains you APs (advancement points), which you can spend on either or both, which is actually a very subtle and liberating mechanic. Do you push up your attributes and concentrate on a reduced set of skills and become highly specialised, or the trade-jack most succumb to? By having to think more about how attributes and skills interact, rather than casually advancing both, the design pushes you to ponder consequences and takes away the luxury of being able to judge another player by their class uniform. As much as it wants to entertain, Fallen Earth wants to immerse you, and it does so better that both Aion and Champions Online and many other recent releases.

First-person combat –or third if you prefer – is a tough one to call. With the need to use your aiming recticle it lends combat an urgency that is all-too rare in MMOGs, but it doesn't quite reach the heights we once enjoyed in, say, Tabula Rasa. This is as much to do with the AI of the NPCs, which when aggroed will simply bound at you and run through a sequence of unconvincing animations until you've dispatched them. You can crouch and even go prone, but neither seems to offer much advantage in combat. Despite such issues, even when starting out and your options are limited, you at least have more than the one or two keyboard shortcuts other games ration out as interaction, and it doesn't take too long to pick up better equipment (although you'll have to earn it), or

SIX PACKS

Forget Horde vs Alliance, Fallen Earth comes with six ready-made factions for you to align yourself with. Each faction has two allies and one arch enemy among the other five, so it's impossible to be on first-name terms with the leaders of each.

CHOTA
Children of the Apocalypse to the uninformed. They are a despondent lot who insist on destructive anarchy on the basis that the world is screwed already. Fair point.

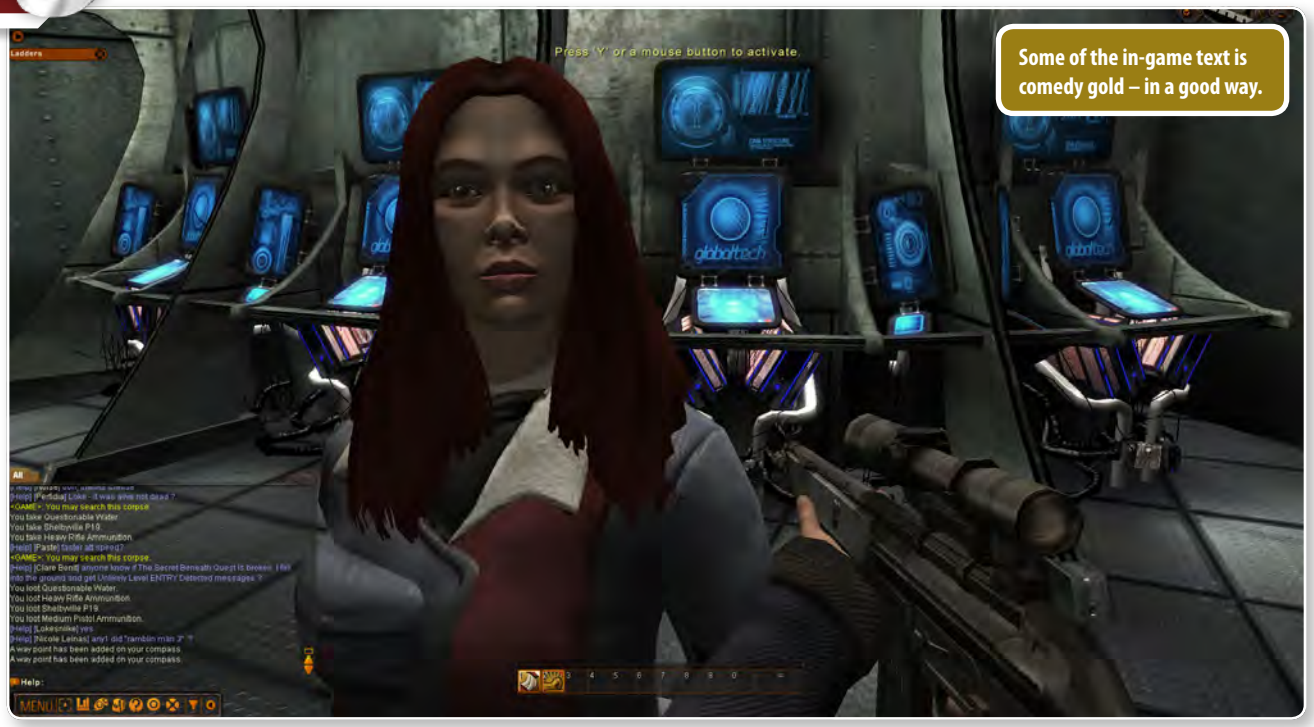
Enforcers
This bunch believe that if humanity is to regain its place in the food chain, they must stick to the rules and punish those who flaunt them. Republicans.

Lightbearers
The apocalypse may have wiped out most humans, but it's bestowed the survivors with a path to redemption via mutatgenics.

Techs
There's always one group who live by the maxim 'what doesn't destroy us makes us stronger', and in Fallen Earth it would appear to be the science brigade.

Travellers
Who would've thought that travellers would be the ones selling capitalism to the world in the wake of global disaster. Who better to trade though than those with caravans?

Vistas
It's no surprise that the Green Party gained political ground, but that they had to name themselves after Microsoft's most maligned operating system seems odd.



Some of the in-game text is comedy gold – in a good way.

You can ride a horse or an ATV almost from the beginning.

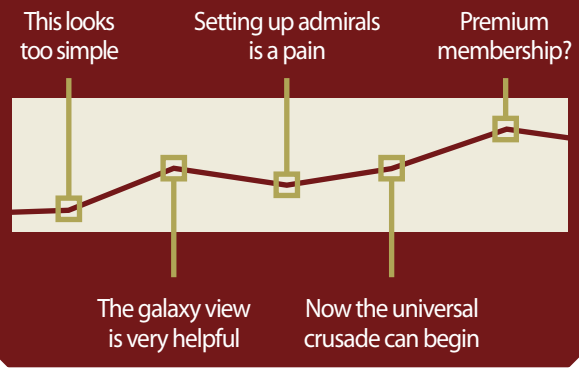
Fallen Earth continued

even a basic mount on which to explore the world around you.

While flat, and in places devoid of even basic foraging materials, the fact that you can head out and explore is very welcome. Being corralled into zones on the basis of rank may be justified in a story-driven game, but here you have a crafting system that requires players to get out further. It's a production and trade system that is more liberating than in most MMOGs, with the cost being that it requires more effort to succeed.

Fallen Earth is a game that is easy to like. It has a few disconcerting traits, as befitting a game developed on a tight budget, and there are calls that beyond the starting levels the game world is rather empty (we shall explore further, though), but for a new release, and one that is picking up players through word of mouth, we sense that Fallen Earth has a much brighter future than its contemporaries would like to admit. As much as the team seem to be addressing the problems of the game – and they've addressed a significant number in a recent patch – they are treating their community fairly and the community are granting the developers patience in return. Although the NPC residents would disagree, this is an MMOG with a bright future.

PULSOMETER: Signs of life


This looks too simple
Setting up admirals is a pain
Premium membership?
The galaxy view is very helpful
Now the universal crusade can begin

MMOZine Verdict

No one said the apocalypse was meant to be easy

- A challenging and unique environment
- Developing one-world economy
- Action-focused combat

Publisher: EA
Developer: EA Mythic
Heritage: Dark Age of Camelot
Link: www.warhammeronline.com
OUT NOW

Warhammer Online: Path of Conquest

The path less-travelled

After its promising launch but troubled early life, developers Mythic have obviously been agonising over how to remould Warhammer Online – a good but underachieving MMO – into a great and successful MMO.

Earlier in the year at GDC Austin, Jeff Hickman, Executive Producer on Warhammer, identified three problems that had held the game back from being the killer MMO the Beta had promised. Summarised quickly, they were that the combat against AI was too easy, that there was no reason to socialise or form anything other than casual groups, and that there wasn't any strong economic backbone to make the game interesting in the long run. These, Mythic felt, were the problems that held WAR back – and these are the ones that recent updates, including October's Path of Conquest, were aiming to fix.

So, since we last covered the game in MMOZine 10, what changes have happened? Firstly Mythic introduced the Call to Arms update that represented the last elements of the game's original design (filling in the missing capital cities and classes). This was followed by the Land of the Dead, an Undead-occupied Egyptian area, which in many players' minds, was a soundly designed area but with Warhammer's already extent player population problems, drew players away from the key Realm Versus Realm battles (which are, in themselves, still the best part of the game, and further improved in PoC).

More importantly, have those problems been fixed? The difficulty in PVE is hard to judge, but the addition of the Apprentice system in Path of Conquest is certainly a good move. Riffing off City of Heroes' sidekicking system, this allows players of all levels to play with each other, with the lower-level character being temporarily buffed to match his mentor's level. It also, from Mythic's admission,

Monstrous trees? That's life, ent it?

Ooh, that's really got my goat.

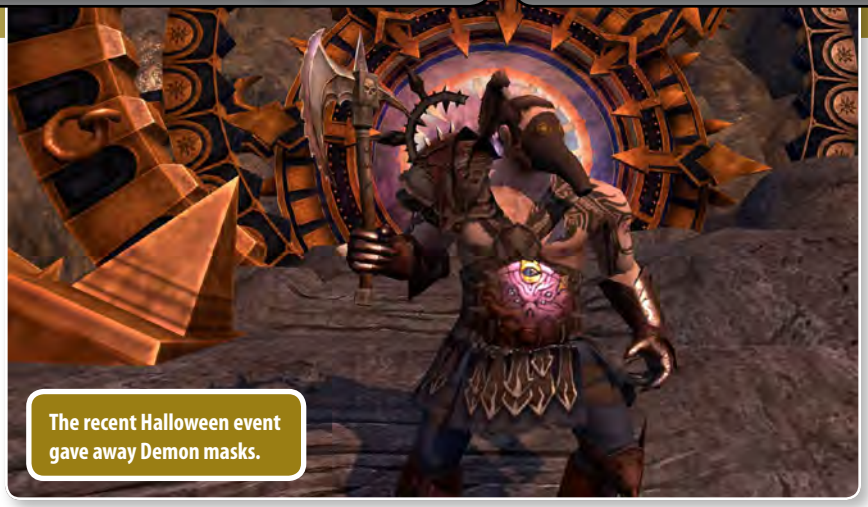
Warhammer cont.

allows ease of power-levelling, so the apprentice can catch up with his mentor double-quick.

Path of Conquest has also consolidated the new users' areas, to make sure n00bs have someone else to play with. Now you either start in Norsca or Nordland, which are now buzzing with people – though you can always visit the Ghost Towns that are the old racial starting areas, if you want. You're also automatically a part of a New Player Guild, to make it easier to find parties. It has to be said, this streamlining really works alongside the open grouping, and new players are going to find this, initially, a fun experience – but it has yet to be carried out right through the game.

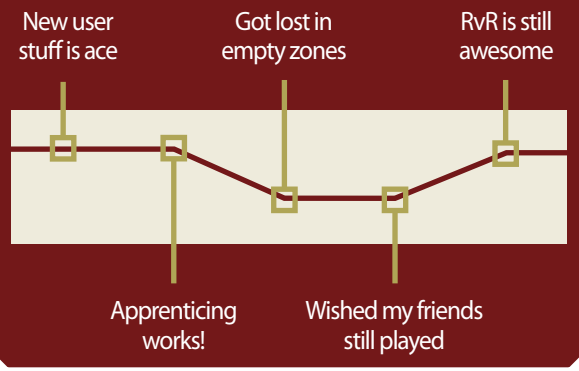
There are still other problems, apart from those Mythic called out. The engine itself is still somewhat suspect, though there are fixes for the server issues in Path to Conquests. The way the world is broken up is itself a problem – wandering off the standard levelling route makes you suddenly very lonely. The final problem is pretty much unfixable – to old Warhammer aficionados, the game feels more like a generic MMO than it does like the Old World.

Mythic are trying very hard to get Warhammer fixed for the general public and their efforts are slowly bearing fruit. If, as we suspect, the core engine being incompatible with the world design is at the heart of their problems, they will have to make hard decisions in the near future. Meanwhile, the game is better than ever – but still not as good as it could be.



The recent Halloween event gave away Demon masks.

PULSOMETER: Signs of life



The Land of the Dead update introduced sand. Lots of it.

A stag party…

MMOZine Verdict

It's a long and winding road

- Server fixes
- New user experience
- Apprentice system

WIN! $500 OF EVE ONLINE GEAR!

Take your pick from the EVE Online store

The EVE Store was set up soon after the release of the game because fans liked the designs of ships and logos and wanted to buy them on a T-shirt. Over the years, mugs, posters and keychains were added, and today you can drool over more than 100 items – from magazines, novels, a soundtrack CD, beers glasses, ship models and even a celebrated EVE boardgame. Some EVE Store items are true collectors pieces.

CCP have kindly offered one MMOZine reader the opportunity to go wild in the EVE Store (http://store.eve-online.com), with $500 of EVE Store credit. You can pick out a new wardrobe, acquire a lifetime supply of EVE socks for your dad, a full set of shot glasses for your mum, and still have enough left for a Guristas T-shirt for each of your girlfriends. Best of all, you don't even have to worry about mailing costs, as CCP will ship from their warehouse in Atlanta to anywhere in the world. (Please note that neither CCP Games nor Cranberry Publishing can be held responsible for lost or misdirected mail, customs charges, local taxes or any additional costs.)

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Competition closes 14/12/2009. See website for full T&Cs.

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10 FOR 2010

With the festive season fast approaching, we look ahead to what's in store for 2010, with a run-down of the 10 games and expansions we are most looking forward to

PLUS!

Runes of Magic

Reviews of the latest expansions for EVE and Lord of the Rings

MMOZine Issue 17

Out 15th December!

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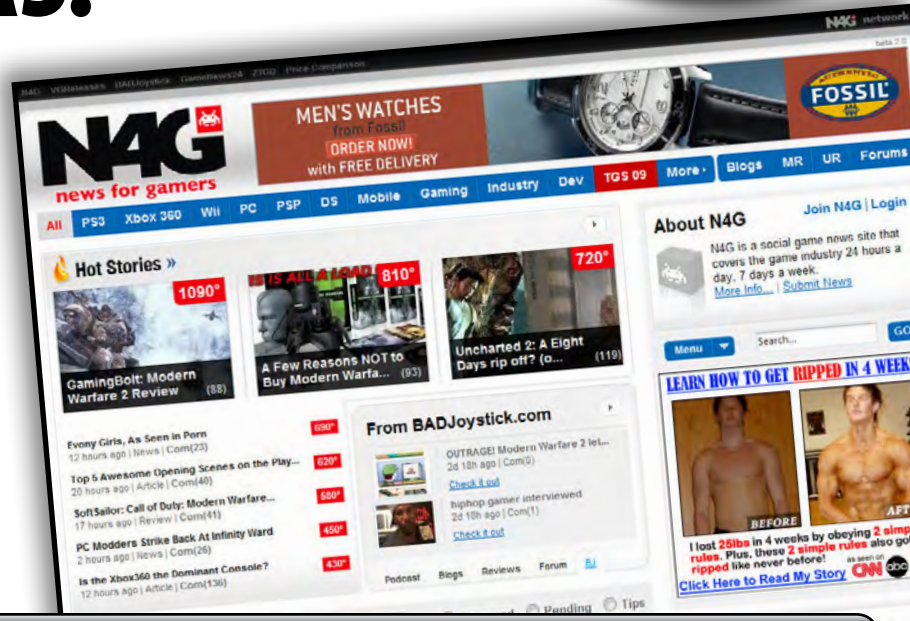
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